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PP RUEHHM
DE RUEHHM #0520 1311014
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 111014Z MAY 07
FM AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2616
INFO RUEHHI/AMEMBASSY HANOI PRIORITY 1895
RUEHPF/AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH PRIORITY 0029
RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY 2813

UNCLAS HO CHI MINH CITY 000520

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [SOCI](#) [PINR](#) [VM](#)

SUBJECT: FIVE ETHNIC KHMER MONKS IMPRISONED IN THE MEKONG DELTA

REF: HCMC 489

1. (SBU) Five ethnic Khmer monks from the Mekong Delta province of Soc Trang were sentenced by the local provincial court on May 10 to between two and four years imprisonment for "disturbing public order." The five allegedly were organizers of protests in Soc Trang on February 8. The incident reportedly stemmed from a "routine" traffic stop of two or three Khmer monks on a motorbike that escalated into a confrontation between local Khmer monks and the police. Monks Kim Muol (aka Kim Muon) and Danh Tol were sentenced to four-years in prison, Thach Thuong received a three-year sentence and Ly Suong received a two-year sentence. These four individuals were reported detained in Reftel. A fifth, previously unknown Khmer Buddhist, Ly Hoang, also was sentenced to two-years imprisonment.

2. (SBU) According to HCMC TV and press, which covered the trial, Kim Muol, Danh Tol and Ly Hoang, "slandered" traffic police by accusing the authorities of preventing the monk or monks involved in the traffic stop from begging for food and thereby violating their religious freedom. According to the prosecutor's indictment, the three "incited" more than 100 Buddhist students from the local seminary to protest in front of the police station, "causing a traffic jam and serious impact on daily life of people and organizations in the area for over 2 hours." Ly Suong and Thach Thuong allegedly organized another 30 monks from a neighboring pagoda to join the protest. The television report on the trial concluded with the editorial comment that "this is the lesson for those who abuse religion to disturb the People's solidarity."

3. (SBU) Comment: Contacts in the Mekong Delta, who earlier were willing to discuss the detention and defrocking of ethnic Khmer monks (Reftel) were evasive or refused to provide information on the trial even though we were told that they attended. In its handing out of tough sentences for relatively minor protests and its public warning that others that "disturb the People's solidarity" would get the same treatment, the GVN once again is making clear that it will brook no whiff of public dissent or discontent. End Comment.

WINNICK